

The Ulster Hospital — a short history

H Logan

PROLOGUE

The Ulster Hospital was founded on the philanthropy of the people of Belfast — a town which, in the second half of the nineteenth century, was undergoing a population explosion resulting from industrial expansion: 97,784 souls in 1851 had become 174,412 in 1871, 255,950 in 1891, and 386,947 in 1911; furthermore, the surrounding districts shared in this expansion. There were many industries, but linen manufacture and shipbuilding were the most important and they brought about growth in many other trades. The results of this success were many — wealth for the owners, over-crowding, long working hours (in often damp, dusty conditions) and consequently ill health for the workers. It was not surprising that there were many hospitals opened to cater for the maladies of the poor and these were provided by the better off. The Ulster Hospital for Children was one of them.

HISTORY

In the Autumn of 1872, Dr John Martin proposed that a hospital be opened to deal exclusively with the diseases of children. Martin, born in 1839 the son of a general practitioner in Newtownards, undertook his medical studies in the Andersonian Institute in Glasgow, obtaining his licence in the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in 1858 at the age of 19. He became a dispensary doctor in Fivemiletown and took his medical qualification at the King's & Queen's

College of Physicians (now the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland) in 1868 returning shortly afterwards to be Apothecary and later Medical Officer to the Barrack Street Dispensary in Belfast. It took Dr Martin and his supporters some months to raise the money to start the charity and it was not until July – August 1873 that the premises at 12 Chichester Street (Fig 1) were opened. (At the same time, certainly within weeks either before or after this, the Belfast Hospital for Sick Children was opened in King Street.)

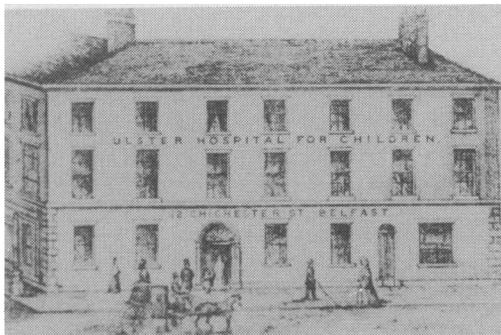


Fig 1. The Hospital in Chichester Street (Arthur Street is at the left end of the building).

The late Dr Hugh Calwell presented the known facts as to why two children's hospitals should open at the same time,¹ but the evidence is not sufficiently complete to allow any firm conclusions to be drawn. However, both hospitals were kept busy and, although several attempts were made to amalgamate them,

in 1873 and later, the Management Committees could not agree and they both developed in their own ways.

Number 12 Chichester Street, the building chosen for The Ulster Hospital, was on the eastern corner of Chichester Street and Arthur Street. There was accommodation for 14 cots, but most of the work was with outpatients, while some patients were visited in their homes. The hospital was an immediate success and in the first year there were 99 admissions, 6,731 outpatient attendances and 367 home visits. The expenditure for the first year was £379.6s.3d. and despite the careful housekeeping of the Ladies' Management Committee, which ran the charity, this was £35.8s.2d. more than its income. There was also a Ladies' Visiting Committee — a tradition which persists to this day playing much the same role. The Matron was responsible for the internal management of the house and the rules laid down permitted her to be absent from it only from 6.45 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. on Sunday and 7.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. on Wednesday. There were also stringent rules for the nurses, the first of which was that they had to be able to read and write.

The work of the hospital increased, and by 1876 it was obvious that the premises in Chichester Street were unsatisfactory and a move was made to 11 Fisherwick Place (Fig 2) which allowed the number of cots to be increased to 22. The house was on the site at present occupied by the ABC Cinema; the Consumptive Hospital was nearby. Professor R F Dill (Professor of Midwifery, QCB, 1868 – 93) lived in no. 3 and Dr Henry MacCormac (Professor of the Theory and Practice of Physic, RBAI, 1837 – 49) lived in no. 7.

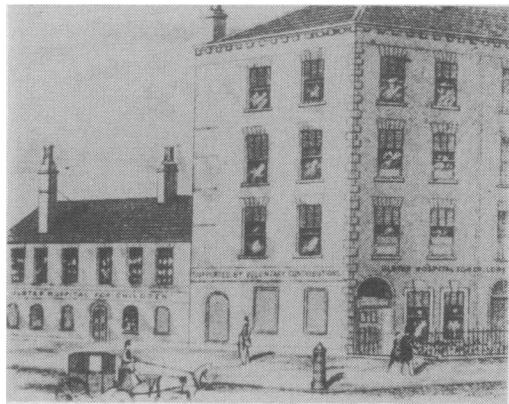


Fig 2. 11 Fisherwick Place.

In the first year on this site medical students attended for the first time and the hospital has therefore been associated with undergraduate education for 110 years. This came about because the students had to have certificates signifying that they had attended classes in the diseases of children. More controversial was a later request that the hospital should admit women, an event which eventually took place in 1882. The *Annual Report* for that year states —

'The Committee were urged to add this department, in the first instance, so as to meet the requirements of the Royal University of Ireland, which will not grant its Degree of Doctor of Medicine [the then primary degree] to a student unless he produce a certificate, given by some Hospital recognised by the University which will show that he has received clinical instruction in Midwifery and in the Special Diseases of Women and Children in addition to the Certificate of Clinical Instruction in General Disease, formerly required by the Queen's University.'

The *Report* also records that they opened the facility only for this reason; however, there was obviously a need in Belfast for such a facility, there being only four gynaecology beds in the General Hospital. Dr Martin disagreed with the idea and he and his wife resigned from the Management Committee because of it.

Ten beds for gynaecology were made available by taking two flats in an adjoining house and there were two evening outpatient sessions in addition to the two morning sessions and three evening sessions for the diseases of children.

The first result of the introduction of gynaecology into the hospital was that the name was changed to The Ulster Hospital for Children and Women. Secondly, the university required there to be a professor on the medical staff and Professor Robert Foster Dill was appointed in 1881 when he was 70. Dill, a member of the famous family of the same name, was a son of the manse and qualified in Glasgow. He was appointed to the Chair of Midwifery in 1868, having joined the staff of the Lying-In Hospital in 1855. However, in 1861 as a result of some difference in opinion with the Ladies' Committee he was not re-appointed but continued to lecture students in his home nearby at 3 Fisherwick Place and take them with him on his domiciliary midwifery calls. Dill was also the City Coroner and occupied this post together with his position on The Ulster Hospital Medical Staff until his death in 1893.

On 1 May 1882 a meeting took place in the hospital between representatives of the Medical Staff (Drs Esler, McFarland and Wheeler) and Medical Officers of the Belfast Dispensary District (Drs Spedding, Coats, Wadsworth and Clements) at which it was agreed

‘to combine together to form an institution which can grant students a certificate in the three subjects of Midwifery, Diseases of Women and Children such as is required by the Examining Board of the Royal University.’

This led to the domiciliary midwifery service and each dispensary doctor agreed to take two medical students for a series of deliveries. The minutes of this meeting are the first Medical Staff minutes now existing.

It has been suggested that Dill initiated the Ulster Hospital Gold Medal, but the Medical Staff minutes for September 1884 record that a Gold Medal was proposed



Fig 3. The Ulster Hospital Gold Medal: on the right the first medal awarded (1884–1897) and on the left the new medal introduced in 1922.

by Dr Lindsay and seconded by Dr Spedding. Students who attended the hospital during the winter sessions were eligible to sit an examination in gynaecology, midwifery and paediatrics for the Gold Medal, and a Silver Medal was available for those attending the summer session. The first medal (which was provided by Dill) was awarded in 1885 and subsequently each year until it lapsed in 1897 (Fig 3). The Gold Medal was reintroduced in 1922 by Dr Robert Marshall, who was then Medical

Staff secretary. There was no special hospital emblem for the first series, but the Praeger Plaque was embossed on the 1922 medal and this is the form which has been used ever since. The Medal again lapsed from 1934 until 1956 since when there has been an annual examination, although the medal has not always been awarded. (See list of winners).

Despite its success, the hospital was continually beset by financial problems. Like all the other hospitals it was maintained entirely by voluntary subscription, the

money being raised mainly by door-to-door collections, fêtes, sales, and donations from the better-off which, if over twenty guineas, made them Governors for life. The constraints imposed by lack of funds are a recurring theme throughout the Medical Staff minutes: for example in 1880 we read —

‘More children would have been admitted had all the beds been open, but due to financial considerations the Management Committee permitted only the large ward to be opened.’

How little things have changed — 106 years later, 55 beds lie vacant in the present Ulster Hospital for the same reason. The effects today are similar to those recorded in the Medical Report in 1888 —

‘A large number of cases had to be refused admission owing to the wards being already fully occupied.’

Despite these problems the number of patients attending the hospital was greater than the facilities could cope with and the Management Committee were faced either with making extensive alterations to the premises in Fisherwick Place or moving to larger accommodation. They chose the latter in 1891 though the *Annual Report* for 1890 and 1891 do not explicitly outline the reasons. Similarly, the Medical Staff minutes record only some vague discussion at the April 1891 meeting, but at a special meeting held in May, rooms were allocated in Roundhill House, Templemore Avenue, Mountpottinger (Fig 4), the new premises chosen for the hospital. The Medical Staff meeting held on 20 October 1891 was in Fisherwick Place; the next was held in College Square on 17 November, and the December meeting took



Fig 4. Roundhill House, Templemore Avenue, Mountpottinger.

place in Roundhill House. Presumably the move across the Lagan took place some time in November 1891, the building being opened officially on 21 November 1892 by J Blakiston-Houston, Deputy Lieutenant.

The transfer from Fisherwick Place to Mountpottinger was not without its opponents as the following document, signed by five local doctors, testifies:

‘We the undersigned Medical Practitioners of Ballymacarrett and neighbourhood hereby promise and agree to refrain from taking any part in connection with the Hospital now proposed to be established in Roundhill House.’

Unfortunately the doctors' reasons for not welcoming the hospital are not made clear: perhaps they were worried by loss of custom! The new premises were larger than those in the town centre — accommodation for maternity, ophthalmic and ear, nose and throat patients were available and there was also an operating theatre. Two local doctors were appointed to the staff, since the other staff members lived across the river and at some distance from the hospital and it was felt that it would be an advantage to have staff who lived nearby. The workload increased yet again and was inevitably accompanied by financial and staffing problems. One suggestion of the Medical Staff was that the hospital should

discontinue the practice of giving free drugs to patients and an arrangement was made with the local chemists whereby the prescriptions written in the hospital would be dispensed cheaply by them, thus saving the hospital £100 per year. Whether this saving was put to the employment of more staff is not known, but at that time the Matron was paid £50 per year and a District Nurse for midwifery £25, both 'with Board and Washing'.

The ambition of the Medical Staff and the Management Committee was to have a purpose-built hospital and in 1906 a fund was opened to raise £10,000. Gustavus Wolff gave £1,000 on condition that the full sum required was collected before building commenced. This showed his wisdom, as fund-raising proved difficult, partly due to the American financial panic of 1907 which had world-wide repercussions. The Jaffé family generously gave the fund £1,000 in 1909, allowing work on the Hospital to start in 1911. During the time of the building the hospital transferred to The Rectory, 225 Albertbridge Road: the facilities were necessarily restricted and a temporary building had to be erected in the garden for the Extern Department.

Exactly 12 months after the foundation-stone was laid, the new buildings were opened by the Countess of Shaftesbury in May 1912 (Fig 5).

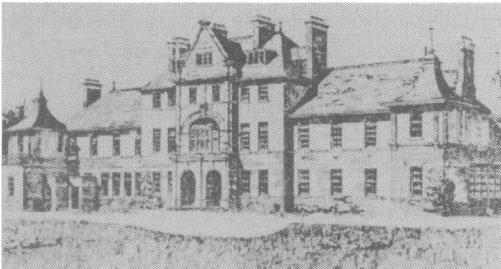


Fig 5. The new hospital in Templemore Avenue, 1912.

There was now accommodation for 46 children and six women, and the total cost of construction and equipping the building was £11,890 — tight budgetary control leading to a surplus of £5 when the work was completed!

The new building led to a considerable increase in the work done, and between the last year in Roundhill House and the first year in the new

premises the admissions increased by 50%, extern attendances by 27%, visits by 37% and operations by 34% — impressive figures by any standards. The hospital was popular in Ballymacarrett and was known affectionately as 'the Wee Hospital'. This popularity must have been due, not to the buildings nor to the service provided in them, but to the people associated with the hospital — the Nursing and Medical Staff, the Management Committee, and the Ladies' Committee who visited the hospital on a regular basis and raised much of the money to keep it functioning. The present Medical Staff are well aware of the eminence of their predecessors, some of whom have already been mentioned. Time does not permit more than a brief mention of others like Sir William Whitla, Sir J Walton Browne, Dr Esler and Sir Thomas Houston, each of whom deserves a lecture on his own. However, the names on the salver illustrated in Fig 6 give an idea of the calibre of the staff at one time. It was presented to Mr (later Sir) Samuel Irwin on his retirement from the Hospital in 1931. 'ST' joined the Staff as assistant surgeon in 1908 but was replaced due to illness in 1910, regaining the post in 1912. Two years later he replaced the famous A B Mitchell as a full surgeon. The names of the Medical Staff on the salver include some of the most eminent members of the profession at that time and are remembered with

reverence today. The names are: S Simms, G D T McFadden, R Marshall, F P Montgomery, H Hilton Stewart, R J McConnell, S Geddes, C A Calvert, Isaac Davidson, H Hardy Greer, C H G Macafee and G R B Purce. These were the men who guided the hospital through the years between the wars, with few changes taking place.

In 1920, the first X-ray machine was installed and Dr Beath was appointed as radiologist. In 1925 he was replaced by Dr (later Sir) Frank Montgomery who when the war came, was also in charge of fire-watching. His son tells me that when the siren sounded, his father used to

grab his tin hat and set off for the Ulster Hospital on the other side of the Lagan. Unfortunately, he was unable to prevent the results of the bombing of 1941. On the night of 7/8 April the hospital was sprayed by incendiary bombs and a week later on the night of 15/16 April a large bomb fell, demolishing the new gynaecological wing built only a few years earlier. On the 4/5 May another bomb landed on the roof and, although badly damaged, the hospital continued to act as a casualty clearing station.

While one of the present Operating Department assistants remembers being in the hospital at the time of one of the air raids and having been taken to Saintfield House the next day, Dr R Marshall recorded that the children had already moved there as the Reverend Canon Blackwood-Price had offered this house to accommodate them during the remainder of the war.² A local general practitioner, Dr McKelvey, helped by looking after the patients and visiting them every day. To provide support, the Medical Staff gave Dr McKelvey a rota of consultants upon whom he could call in an emergency. What a change it must have been for a child in a small terrace house in Ballymacarrett to be transferred into the country and the beautiful surroundings of Saintfield House. It was not until November 1941 that the hospital obtained the use of Haypark House, off the Ormeau Road, formerly a school for mentally defective children, for the gynaecological patients. In November 1944, when Saintfield House was restored to its owners, the children came to Haypark, and I well remember going there as a medical student for tuition in paediatrics and to Templemore Avenue to attend the outpatient clinics which had continued there.

In 1943 the Medical Staff decided that the hospital should be rebuilt as a general hospital, and the Management Committee agreed. A site was purchased at Belmont but it was found that because of the Airport at Sydenham only two-storey buildings could be erected. The site was subsequently sold by the Northern Ireland Hospitals Authority (NIHA). Later the present site at Dundonald was purchased and the money which had been raised to rebuild the hospital (£100,000) was handed over to the NIHA and building commenced in 1956. The first plans were

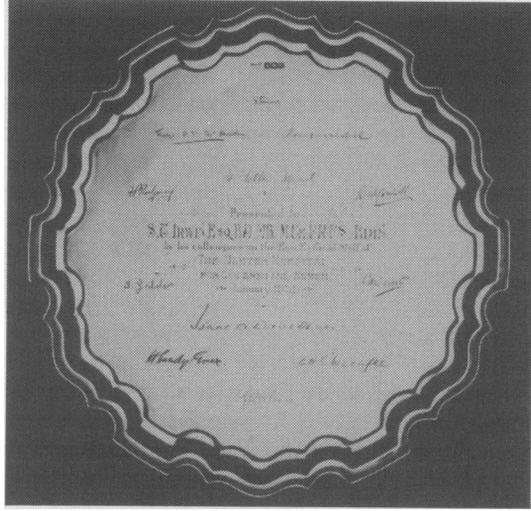


Fig 6. Silver salver presented to Mr S T Irwin, FRCS, on his retirement in 1931.

for 300 beds (paediatric, gynaecological and maternity) with the possibility of a further 200 beds for adult medicine and surgery to be added later. The first block was opened in 1963 and the second in 1968.³ Subsequently a building for the Accident & Emergency Department was erected and later a special 144-bed Geriatric Unit.

EPILOGUE

The original building in Chichester Street housed 14 cots and in Dundonald there are now a total of 687 beds. In the first year there were 99 admissions and in 1985 there were 18,111. Outpatient figures for the two years were 6,731 and 148,841. By any standards this is a phenomenal growth and all those who work at Dundonald are proud of 'their' hospital. We can no longer be referred to as the 'Wee Hospital' but we hope that we are maintaining the friendly atmosphere which apparently existed before our expansion. We are also proud of our 110-year association with this great Medical School and we hope it will continue in the future. We congratulate the Medical School on this its 150th year and wish it every success in the future.

I wish to thank the Medical Staff of The Ulster Hospital for allowing me to study the Medical Staff Minutes of the Hospital and the Unit of Management Committee for allowing me to study the Annual Reports. Sir Ian Fraser kindly allowed his Gold Medal to be photographed. Dr W Maguire, The Ulster Museum, helped by providing access to the Welsh collection, slides from which were used in the lecture. Col. M C Perceval-Price permitted me to visit Saintfield House. Mr S T Irwin, FRCS, loaned his grandfather's salver for photographing. Mr N Ervine did the photographic work and Mrs Carol Gray typed the manuscript. To all of them I extend my sincere thanks.

FINAL YEAR MEDICAL STUDENTS — WINNERS OF MEDAL

1884	J L Livingston	(gold)
	G S Thompson	(silver)
1887	R W Haslett	(gold)
	Mr Love	(silver)
1888	Robt Lyons	(gold)
1889	Jas Taylor	(gold)
	N Morton	(silver)
1890	J Scott	(gold)
1893	Mr Herron	
1894	W H Osborne	
1896	W Paisley	
1897	D McCay	
1922	Miss Ethel Bamford	
1923	Ian Fraser	
1925	J C Davidson	
1926	L C Mayne	
1927	Mr Nevin	
1928	J H Biggart	
1929	H G Calwell	
1930	J H Gillespie	
1931	Miss L V Reilly	
1932	Not Awarded	
1933	Not Awarded	

1956	G W Johnston
1957	Miss Ingrid V Allen
1958	A H G Love
1959	Miss Dinah Kohner
1961	M Khan
1962	Douglas Lee
1963	Michael Scott
1964	Miss Ruth Imrie
1965	R W Stout
1966	F C Stanford
1967	P Kennedy
1969	Mrs Barbara E Golden
1970	Not Awarded
1971	Miss Pamela C Young
1972	Not Awarded
1973	B Atkinson
1974	John N Patten
1975	Ian Taylor
1976	Malcolm Arnold
1977	Patrick Bell
1978	Russell Houston
1979	Not Awarded
1980	Miss Kathleen Bell
1981	Not Awarded
1982	Graham McGeown
1983	G Troughton
1984	A Greer
1985	Miss Suzanne Guy
1986	Miss Jennifer McCabe

REFERENCES

1. Calwell HG. The life and times of a voluntary hospital: the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children 1873 – 1948. Belfast: Brough, Cox & Dunn, 1973.
2. The story of the Ulster Hospital. Part 1 – 1873-1952, by R Marshall. [Belfast: The Ulster Hospital], 1974: 27.
3. *Ibid.* Part 2 – 1952-1973, by K N M Kelly. [Belfast: The Ulster Hospital], 1974: 35-77.